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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Having written last month about some of the criteria I feel are pertinent to evaluating an NAEB convention, I have been especially interested in looking over the completed questionnaires which have been returned by those attending the San Francisco meeting. The response covers a predictable range, reflecting the particular interests and experience backgrounds of the attendees. Many were enthusiastic -- almost ecstatic -- asserting it was the "best convention ever"; others, less influenced by San Francisco's undoubted attributes, were, nonetheless, impressed by the quality of the program. Most of the critical comments dealt with non-substantive aspects, such as the high cost of the rooms and the remote location of the hotel. Still others deplored the lack of relevance in some of the program features to the precise interests of educational broadcasters.

The significant comments -- and the genuinely disturbing ones -- concerned the failure of the convention to provide for carrying on the business of the association: to give the membership opportunity to really discuss and debate, to examine alternatives, to make decisions. There were remarks such as these: "We came to vote and never had a chance."; "It was all cut and dried;"; "Too much power politics,"; "I didn't feel like a participant, just an observer."

There is too much truth in these observations. Much of the time in the business sessions was consumed in reporting -- an exercise that might better be limited to delivering oral briefs of written reports. This arrangement would leave more time for discussion and interchange -- for the reverberant aspect of the convention I described last month. Perhaps an hour might be set aside solely for the purpose of interrogation by the membership of its officers (alively feature of the Norman meeting).

Unquestionably, more time could and should be reserved in future conventions for business sessions conducted in a thoroughly professional fashion with time effectively utilized for group consideration and decision making. We will continue to try to improve each convention over its predecessor. However, in my judgement, a convention by its very nature can never be an adequate mechanism for thorough study and analysis of the organization convening. The pressures of a three-day program of varied activities is not conducive to probing in depth, to giving deliberate consideration, to making conscientious choices and clear judgements, to developing creative group thinking, to shaping self destiny. And yet, every now and again, these kinds of functions need being done.

Any mature association must have some sort of self-correcting feed-back mechanism which helps it to change directions in response to unanticipated conditions or in recognition of unproductive programs. It must also develop the means for orderly correction of recognized shortcomings.

A part of these functions can be fulfilled at the national convention, in regional conferences, via the committee and board structure, and through correspondence and personal interviews. But these approaches only partially do the job I am thinking about:

a full-scale examination and agonizing appraisal of the NAEB itself.

During the past 10 years NAEB has held more than 30 seminars and workshops devoted to helping its members improve themselves in everything from creative writing and television production and to help advance the cause of such activities (in which its members have a stake) as communications research and live, interconnected netwroks. It is high time, it seems to me, to devote a seminar to the association itself, e.g., an NAEB seminar on the NAEB.

On the 12th anniversary of the first Allerton House seminar -- a landmark meeting which established the aims of educational broadcasting -- I propose an Allerton House conference devoted to a study of the aims and means of implementing them of educational broadcasting;s professional association. It would include a thorough check-up plus prescriptions to insure the association's continuing good health and robust future.

Who would be the attending specialists: For the mostpart they would be drawn from our own ranks: officers, directors, committee chairmen, and retained consultants. Personalizing the association for a moment, I think of NAEB (a la David Riesman's formula) as being largely inner-directed, in the sense that its source of direction was implanted by the pioneers in the movement and is directed toward destined goals and generalized ideological aims. Thus, rather than being overly responsive to the expectations and wishes of others, the NAEB has a gyroscope that keeps it on course. On the other hand, the association must avoid rigidity in its attitudes, maintaining a delicate balance between the demands imposed by maintenance of traditional direction and the impact of the external environment. So, in addition to a gyroscope, it must have radar as were, so that while adhering to what we know is good and true we can still be responding and utilizing signals from a changing environment. In other words, ours is a self-propelled organization that is also realistically responsive to altered circumstances.,

Consequently, I envision the Seminar as being largely our own show -- inner-directed -- with our own leaders bearing the major responsibility. To avoid asitgmatism and self-deception, a few outside experts might well be brought in to give us the benefit of their insights and special competencies. To the contribution of these "others" would be added the inner contribution of working papers provided by each of the standing committees of the NAEB. The preparation of these studies would constitute the principal activity of these committees from the time of their appointment in January until the staging of the seminar in July. With some stimulating presentations from consultants plus carefully prepared papers from the committees, the seminar should have an ordered body of pertinent material to dig into that should go a long way toward assuring a fruitful outcome to its deliberations.

The first Allerton House meeting is reported to have been characterized by the revelation of a great truth -- the truth that educational broadcasting has a job to do and is capable of doing it. I am confident that a third Allerton House seminar such as I propose would generate the same sort of revelations and

exhileration of realistic confidence and assurance that the NAEB not only has a big job to do but is fully capable of doing it.

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